

HAROLD SHAFFER

Summary: Harold Schaffer, longshoreman shares with Betsy Peterson his experiences of working on the waterfront, his step father's influence on his life, his own tryst with politics and how Labor Day does not hold the same meaning now as it did back then.

00.00

Betsy Peterson at the Offices International Longshoreman's Association, Webster, TX
Harold Schaffer, Sept 8, 2011

00.35

Born 1936, Honey Grove TX. Moved to Houston at age 3. Lived across the road from the Union Hall. Gang foreman would use money earned to drink. Could not say much against the gang foreman as would be labelled a radical and not get a job. Labor unions used to march down Main Street. Stepfather had 40+ years on the water. Cotton jammer and cotton screwer are same thing. Cotton was piece work. At 21 years old, went to work longshore and Cotton job. Also worked general cargo in the hold. Quartering time. Stepfather only worked cotton. Was also a great influence in his life.

16.25

Got involved in the port through step-father. Was cotton jammer the whole time. Would work in the hold. Went down to the port at 19 years. Needed a job. Got to carry 7-8 bags in a load. Did 35-40 tons in an hour. Unloaded cattle, on the hoof. Did not have a pension plan earlier. Had to set about creating one. One of the few industries that has not cut back on pension checks.

22.00

Rule of the dock, could not work a ship. Had a 180 days strike in the 60s. Back then, stevedores wanted to break the union. Started working grain boats, and then progressed to steel, general cargo, heavy lifts, etc. Had to make sure there was equipment to work all these jobs. Broke the strike this way. Worked 120 hrs a week for 5 years.

30.00

Started out working in the hold. Stepfather did not want him to work on the waterfront. Grew up knowing only longshoreman. In Houston could get turnkey jobs. Loaded the Western Hunter, biggest ship to ever leave the Port of Houston. The biggest grain load. Was a gear-man. Used to supply all materials that people are going to need, what would work, keep aside, load them and take to the venue. Gear-men were not part of gangs. Gear belonged to the company - Stevedore. Work has been extremely good.

Had a turnbuckle accident and lost the tip of finger. Had another accident and twisted back. Retired after foot accident (shows foot and scars). Year later had triple bypass.

40.15

Been politically active over the years. Believe strongly in the democratic party. Wife worked for Congressman. Wife was President of the Ladies Auxilliary Charter number 1. Their job was to take care of the men. When on strike, ladies got donations from nearby establishments to feed the men.

Walking foreman handled the ship. Superintendent also present. Nowadays superintendent tells the walking foreman, gang foreman and the individuals what to do. Superintendents are from the company. Took all the power away from locals.

49.00

"We had the biggest bunch of misfits that ever gathered under one roof." Everybody had a different personality, different beliefs, different religions. "But when we went down and got on that ship, we came together and gave them as good a workforce as they could have possibly ever trained. " Trained each other. "Hang the whip."

54.20

Loved working under Ralph Langrez - best walking foreman. Jack Hashem best gang foreman.. Had the respect of everybody.

57.50

Everybody would hang out at bars together after work. Did get along with management.

1.02.22

Worked containers. Agreement "no retiree is allowed one red cent from container royalty." Container royalty came in to replace man hours. Been retired 24 years. Should stand up for retirees and working people. Have not had a raise in anything in the past two years. Still trying to promote the ILA. Son is a longshoreman. Harold and Terry both sons work at the port. Checkers job - "bunch of prima donnas"

1.10.00

1979 ran for state Rep. Ran against Mike Jackson. He won by 8% of the points. Interested in the labor movement. Easier to campaign for somebody else than it is for oneself. Father wouldn't even go to union meetings. Son Harold is at the ILA. Terry was at fire department for 22 years. Retired with \$3000 a month and went back to work at checkers local. Worked for a year and ran for business agent.

1.17.12

Business agent calls people about available jobs. Union used to be a lot stronger. Saw labor's strength on Labor Day. Would walk down Main street hand in hand. Did not come to barbecues.

1.20.23

Could blame our leadership for Labor Day not holding any importance for this generation. Was raised on waterfront. Pollution in Deer Park from companies. Container ships can be unloaded and reloaded in 48 hours.

1.25.31

Before containerization loading and unloading would take a 7-10 days and ships would remain for so long. 16- 18 men on one ship. Now, three gangs, ten men to a gang. Loading and unloading almost unreal.

1.26.37

Can work with non union people for one tenth of union employees. Conditions, benefits, wages difference in wages. If there was no insurance and only had to pay a wage with no pension plan, cuts payroll way back.

1.28.30

TAPE ENDS PREMATURELY

(Subject continues talking but tape stopped unexpectedly)